

PREPARED REMARKS<sup>1</sup> OF ROD J. ROSENSTEIN  
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND  
GREENBELT, MARYLAND  
SEPTEMBER 12, 2005

ANNOUNCING A SENTENCE OF LIFE IMPRISONMENT  
FOR "SERIAL ARSONIST" THOMAS SWEATT

INTRODUCTION

Good morning. My name is Rod Rosenstein. I am the United States Attorney for Maryland. I want to welcome you to our federal courthouse here in Greenbelt, Maryland.

I am honored today to be joined by the leaders of some of the federal, state and local law enforcement agencies that worked together in our Serial Arson Task Force to investigate and prosecute Thomas Sweatt:

Ken Wainstein, United States Attorney for the District of Columbia

Theresa Stoop, Special Agent in Charge for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives, or ATF. Ms. Stoop took the lead in investigating this case and she deserves enormous credit for devoting the personnel and resources needed to catch Mr. Sweatt.

*[INTRODUCE STATE AND LOCAL AGENCY HEADS]*

Acting Battalion Chief Scott Hoaglande, Prince George's County Fire - Emergency Management System

Fire Marshal Michael Fleming, District of Columbia Fire- Emergency Management Systems

??Chief Gary Mesaris, Alexandria Fire Department

Sergeant Michael Powell, Maryland State Police

Captain Tera Nelson, Detective Sergeant Norman Snyder, and Investigator Gerald Price, Howard County Police Department

Commander Michael Anzallo, Captain Reese and Lieutenant Eugene Bentley, Metropolitan Police Department, District of Columbia

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Rosenstein often deviates from prepared remarks.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to the prosecutors and investigators who worked on this case. The lead prosecutors and agents are here with me today:

Assistant United States Attorneys Mythili Raman and James Trusty of the District of Maryland

Assistant United States Attorney Jennifer Anderson of the District of Columbia

ATF Special Agents Scott Fulkerson and Thomas Daley, who worked tirelessly, day and night, weekends and holidays, to catch the serial arsonist before he killed more people.

Some of our partners were not able to be here today. I want to thank Eastern District of Virginia U.S. Attorney Paul McNulty and Assistant U.S. Attorney Morris Parker, Jr. for their assistance.

#### EXTRAORDINARY WORK

**But for the extraordinary work of these investigators and prosecutors, Mr. Sweatt would have set fires to more homes, and he would have killed more innocent people.**

**More houses would have burned and more people would have died if it were not for the remarkable teamwork of our task force of skilled investigators, prosecutors and scientists.**

It took a lot of hard work. Investigators spent hundreds of hours out on the streets, sifting through ashes looking for clues, conducting surveillance and interviewing witnesses. Prosecutors developed legal strategies and issued grand jury subpoenas. Scientists analyzed trace evidence that criminals always leave behind. Business owners and other witnesses stayed alert and told us what they saw and heard.

#### DNA

After a fire that Mr. Sweatt set on September 14, 2003, investigators found a human hair. A single strand of human hair. From that single strand of hair, a scientist was able to conduct a forensic examination to establish the DNA profile of that hair. It matched DNA samples found at three subsequent fires

We were not able to connect the DNA in that single strand of hair to Mr. Sweatt in 2003, because his DNA was not in any database.

The connection to Mr. Sweatt was made only after ATF agents identified him as a suspect, with the help of Naval Criminal Investigative Service agents. We then took a DNA sample from Mr. Sweatt on April 19, 2005. The Montgomery County Crime Laboratory quickly examined Mr. Sweatt's DNA sample and found that it matched the hair discovered in 2003 and three other DNA samples recovered at other fires.

#### CONDUCT

The investigation established that Mr. Sweatt set at least 45 fires in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia between March 2003 and April 2005.

On April 27, 2005, task force investigators arrested Mr. Sweatt and confronted him with the evidence. Mr. Sweatt then confessed that he was the serial arsonist who had terrorized our communities.

In the plea agreement that Mr. Sweatt entered this June, he admitted that he set 45 residential fires and several vehicle fires between March 2003 and April 2005.

## CHARGES

Mr. Sweatt pleaded guilty here at the Greenbelt federal courthouse on June 6, 2005. He was convicted on multiple counts of:

- Possession of destructive devices
- Destruction of buildings by fire resulting in personal injury
- Possession of destructive devices in furtherance of a crime of violence
- First degree and second degree murder under the District of Columbia Criminal Code

Those charges from Maryland, D.C. and Virginia were consolidated for sentencing here in Greenbelt.

## SENTENCE

Today, Judge Deborah Chasanow sentenced Thomas Sweatt to spend the rest of his life in prison for committing those arsons.

Mr. Sweatt's life sentence will not bring back the victims who were killed. It won't rebuild the homes that were destroyed.

It does mean that Mr. Sweatt will never burn down another house and kill another innocent victim. It means that anyone else who thinks about setting a fire will think again when they understand the punishment that they will face. And it demonstrates our commitment to seeking justice and enforcing the rule of law.

## CHARLES COUNTY ARSON

This is the second significant development in an arson case here in Maryland in the past ten days. On September 2, a federal jury convicted Patrick Walsh of setting fire to 26 homes in the Hunters Brooke development in Charles County, Maryland. Two of Mr. Walsh's co-conspirators previously plead guilty. Two more defendants are scheduled for trial in that case early next year.

## COMMITMENT TO CATCH ARSONISTS

The juxtaposition of these two arson cases demonstrates the enormous damage that fire can do.

People who set fires deserve firm and severe punishment. Thanks to the extraordinary teamwork of federal, state and local law enforcement officials, we will see to it that arsonists get the punishment that they deserve.

## COOPERATION

This case is significant because of the tremendous damage that Thomas Sweatt did to properties in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia. It is significant because Mr. Sweatt's fires took the lives of innocent victims.

But there is a positive message in this case. It is the power of coordinated law enforcement.

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, I attended the final meeting of the Serial Arson Task Force at ATF's National Laboratory in Ammendale, Maryland, just a few miles from this courthouse. Special Agent in Charge Theresa Stoop invited the heads of all of the federal, state and local agencies that assisted in the investigation. ATF Director Carl Truscott joined us from Washington to express his appreciation to the Task Force.

By pooling our intelligence and our investigative and scientific resources, law enforcement authorities can catch arsonists. There is always some evidence. There are always some clues. And we will always find them.

*(INTRODUCE NEXT SPEAKER)*